

## **Friedrich Engels: a Man of Noble Merits——dedicated to the 200th Anniversary of Engels' Birth**

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**Abstract:** Friedrich Engels is a great philosopher, thinker, educator as well as proletarian revolutionist. Most importantly, he is a cofounder of Marxism. The year 2020 marks the 200th anniversary of Engels' birth. To commemorate the great character at this very moment, we need to understand the social background of Engels' life, the origin of his thought on materialism, his friendship with Marx and his works. Then through his morals, devotion to proletarian revolution, attitude to study and innovation spirits, it will also be easier to find his noble merits. His wisdom will be passed on forever and the career he embarked on will continue to thrive.

### **1. Introduction**

On November 28th, 1820, Engels was born in Germany. His father, a devout Christian, was a wealthy Prussian aristocrat who owned a factory. Initially, Engels' immersed in European history and culture, mainly Greek culture (featured with humanism) and Hebrew culture (featured with reason and critical spirit). Later, Engels was strongly inspired by modern European philosophy. The immersion in the European history and philosophy later greatly impacted on the formation of Engels' thought on historical materialism.

As president Xi Jinping said, "Time is the mother of thought and practice is the origin of theory,"<sup>[1]</sup> to understand Friedrich Engels' philosophy, we need to know the social background of his life. The 19th century, when Engels was born, sees the rapid growth of capitalist productivity, which brought about a great transform in production relations. That was the economic factor that brought about Engels' thought. Moreover, the 19th century also saw the rapid development of natural science, represented by the three major discoveries in natural science (namely, the cell theory, energy conservation law and theory of evolution), which revealed the universal connection in nature and the evolution of nature. That laid the foundation in natural science for the birth of Marxism.

In addition, German classics, British political economy, and French utopian socialism emerged during the 19th century also influenced Engels. As for German classical philosophy, Hegel's idealistic dialectics and Feuerbach's metaphysical materialism helped Engels a lot in building dialectical materialism<sup>[2]</sup>. As for British political economy, the ideas of Adam Smith and David Ricardo influenced Engels greatly. As for utopian socialism, the sharp critics on capitalism from Saint Simon, Fourier and Irving, the three utopian socialists inspired Engels. In the process of establishing scientific socialism, Engels has critically absorbed the positive ideological achievements from the above thoughts<sup>[3]</sup>.

Engels is an essential founder of Marxism and is worth of respect from all. As a scholar and proletarian revolutionist, he dedicated wholeheartedly to both careers. His thought has far-reaching influence and he left us a great wealth—his contributions to Marxism.

### **2. Friedrich Engels' Loyalty and Kindness**

Engels' loyalty and kindness ran through all his life. He was a loyal friend who was always

generous to offer help. He kept devoting to proletarian revolutions in different countries. He fostered a new generation of proletarian revolutionist. All those deeds prove what a loyal and kind man he is.

## **2.1 Friendship between Two Sworn Friends**

In November 1842, on his way to England, Friedrich Engels visited the editorial department of *Rheinische Zeitung* (Rhenish Newspaper), where he met Carl Marx for the first time. In August 1844, on his way back home, Engels met Marx again. They found that they shared the same aspirations, so their lifelong cooperation began. Although Marx was very rich in thought, he was very poor in real life because almost all his life was accompanied by poverty. Had it not been for Engels' long-term and selfless economic assistance, Marx could not engage in creating theories at all. Engels always regarded Marx's dilemma as his own. In order to be capable of assisting Marx's work, Engels worked in his family company for many years. He resigned from the company, immediately he thought he had enough money to support Marx's family. Moreover, to help the Marxes, Engels was writing for a column of *New-York Tribune*, for which he never wrote under his name, and all the contributions went to Marx. After Marx's death, Engels sorted out a large number of Marx's manuscripts and published the famous *Das Kapital* under the name of Carl Marx. In his later years, Engels also donated most of his heritage to the descendants of Marx.

## **2.2 Instructional Supports for International Workers' Movements**

In the 1870s, due to the rapid development of capitalism and the spread of Marxism in various countries, many countries successively established their own proletarian revolution parties. Apart from his devotion to the ideological and theoretical research for the proletariat, Friedrich Engels also adopted various methods in practice to guide the leaders of the parties, so as to support the socialist workers' movement in those countries. In his letter to Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky, Engels suggested that the best way to understand the proletarian revolutionary theory deeply was to learn from one's own mistakes, which are often inevitable due to the recurrent situation where thoughts lag behind the reality. In his letter, he also pointed out the mistakes of the Workingmen's Party of the United States for adopting dogmatism and sectarianism. Engels was always generously offering suggests and assistance when other countries encountered difficulties in conducting revolutions.

## **2.3 Efforts in Fostering a New Generation of Proletarian Revolutionists**

Through unreserved guidance and assistance, Engels also fostered many revolutionists, who helped the spread of Marxism. When Eduard Bernstein was its chief editor of the official newspaper of the old Social Democratic Party of Germany, Engels instructed how to set the principles and strategies to run the newspaper. He even sent to it his own articles, manuscripts and detailed suggestions on many articles. When the editorial department encountered financial difficulties, he did his best to help it. When Engels learned that French proletarian revolutionist Paul Lafargue was arrested and imprisoned by the authorities, Engels wrote to him many times, aiming at cheering him to take advantage of this experience by drawing lessons from it. Engels not only encouraged Lafargue to actively participate in assemblies and publicize the propositions of the workmen's parties, but also guided him on how to polemicize against the bourgeoisie. Moreover, Engels offered even more assistance and instructions to Marx's little daughter Eleanor after the father's death. With the help of Engels, Eleanor quickly became a proletarian revolutionist and politician. She often participated in the congress of workmen's parties in various countries as a representative and also assisted Engels in sorting out Marx's works, so that Carl Marx's reputable book *Das Kapital* was published.

## **3. Friedrich Engels' Devotion to Proletarian Revolutions**

Friedrich Engels holds great revolutionary spirits, for he devoted selflessly to the proletarian revolutions and remained true to this mission in his entire life. His life was given to stand for the

proletariat trying to improve their lots and to advance the international workmen's movement with his talents.

### **3.1 Unswerving Faith on Proletarian Revolution**

In 1839, Engels, only 19, published "Letters from Wuppertal", which revealed Engels' sympathy with the miserable life of the proletariat and disclosed the cruel exploitation of the capitalists on workers. In 1844, Engels conducted in-depth investigations in a large scale of England, by visiting workers' families and referring to parliamentary reports. The fruit was the publication *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, revealing the tragic fate of the proletariat through voluminous first-hand information. During that period, Engels underwent the "two major transformations", namely, the transformation from idealism to materialism and the transformation from revolutionary democracy to communism <sup>[4]</sup>. Engels devoted all his life to proletarian revolutions, and also paid close attention to the international socialistic women's movement. He encouraged outstanding activists to publish articles in securing women's political status and rights, and enrolled them in the international workers' movement as far as possible. All those deeds show that Engels endeavoured to the liberation of the proletariat, and remained true to that mission all along.

### **3.2. Advocacy of International Workers' Movement**

During the 1840s, Friedrich Engels published a number of articles and books. There were, among others, "Rapid progress of communism in Germany" (1844), "The Brussels Conference on free trade" (1847), "The Communists and Karl Heinzen" (1847), "Principles of Communism" (1847), "The civil war in Switzerland" (1847), "The reform movement in France" (1847). Those works promoted the international worker's movement. Among those works, the most renowned one is the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), which is the first and the greatest guidance for the international communist movement, marking the birth of Marxism <sup>[5]</sup>. Vladimir Lenin once praised, "This book illustrated a new world view in a brilliant and penetrating manner."

## **4. Friedrich Engels' Diligence and Preciseness in Study**

In doing researches and conducting theoretical study, Friedrich Engels always seeks the truth and preciseness based on the realities. It is due to his diligence and preciseness that he cofounded Marxism with Carl Marx, which is one of the most transformative events in the 19th century.

### **4.1. Works and the Creation of Marxism**

Carl Marx and Engels published *The Holy Family* in 1844, in which they criticized Powell's subjective idealism, expounded the thought that material production plays a decisive role in social development, and put forward the important principle that the people play a decisive role in the course history. This book is an important milestone for Marx and Engels in formulating proletarian world view. "It laid the foundation of socialism for revolutionary materialism," Lenin commented *The Holy Family* <sup>[6]</sup>.

Engels and Marx jointly published *German Ideology* in 1845. This book summarized their previous philosophical beliefs, clarified the relation between Marxist philosophy and German classical philosophy, and illustrated their materialistic world view. It is the most important work written by Marx and Engels during their construction of "new materialism" <sup>[7]</sup>. *German Ideology* marks the basic formation of Marxist philosophy, which is the most transformative reform in philosophy <sup>[8]</sup>.

In his later years, Engels contributed a lot to the enrichment and development of historical materialism <sup>[9]</sup>. In "Letter to Joseph Bloch", Engels pointed out that factors of the base play a decisive role in the course of history, but factors of the superstructure are also taking effect. In "Letter to Franz Erdmann Mehring", Engels pointed out that Mehring had only stressed that the content determines the form, but had neglected the relative independence of the form and its retroaction to the content. The course of history had proven that content and form are dialectical and

unified. Engels's elaboration on the relative independence of ideology further enriches Marxist historical materialism. In 1894, Engels' "Letter to Borgius" saturated and developed the basic principles of historical materialism. It elaborated that the decisive force that drives history forward is the means of production, namely, economic relations in historical materialism. Engels also explained the dialectical relationship between production technology and scientific development by remarking, "Once the society has necessity for technology, such necessity will push science forward further than ten universities." This letter also discussed the role of great figures in history and the relationship between the inevitability and contingency in the development of history. These works fully proved Engels' erudition, wisdom, and unremitting pursuit of knowledge.

#### **4. 2. Pursuit of Truth in Scientific Studies**

After Marx's death, Engels studied prehistory, German history, English history and French history, and issued, among others, the third and fourth German editions of *Communist Manifesto*, *The Housing Question*, *The Role of Force in History* and the America and English version as well as the second German edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. In his late years, Engels' study on history brought him the most influential works among others—*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1884. The temporal capitalism was growing in a relatively peaceful manner, so the bourgeoisie tried to prove its permanence from the important social relations of family, private ownership and bourgeois state<sup>[10]</sup>. It was to meet these urgent needs of revolutionary situation and safeguarding revolutionary theory that Engels completed this book in merely two months in 1884. This book, elaborating on basic theories regarding state issues, filled in the blank regarding history of primitive societies in Marxism and revealed the law of human society's development. In 1895, Engels published his last book—*Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, which summarized the great achievements of Marx and Engels in philosophy<sup>[11]</sup>.

#### **5. Friedrich Engels' Innovative Spirit**

Marxism is not a dogma, but a guide to the practice of the proletarian revolution and is constantly growing with the tide of the times. Engels's later years were the very practice of deepening and enriching Marxism in accordance with the times.

##### **5.1. Further Exploration on Marxism through Practice**

Since the publication of *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, Engels has been committed to proletarian revolution. In accordance with the proletarian revolution in many countries and his own practice in revolutions, Engels wrote a series of articles. Those articles include "The Magyar Struggle", "War in Italy and Hungary", "Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany", "Berlin's counter-revolutionary planning", "Revolution and Counter-Revolution", "Campaign for the German Imperial Constitution". Still there were "The Peasant War in Germany" in 1850, "The possibility and Prospect of the Holy Alliance's war against France in 1852", "the German revolution and counter revolution" in 1852 and many other works on wars worldwide after the 1850s.

In 1876, Engels published *Anti-Dühring*. Dühring, member of a big bureaucratic family, criticized Marx's *Das Kapital*, and then published many works to oppose Marxism. In purpose of defending the scientific socialism theory, Engels wrote this famous *Anti-Dühring* in two years, which for the first time comprehensively and systematically elaborated on the three components of Marxism. First of all, in philosophy, he dissected Dühring's idealism and expounded Marxist materialism. Secondly, in political economy, he opposed Dühring's vulgar political economics and illustrated Marx's political economy. Thirdly, in socialism, he argued against Dühring's false socialism and argued for the basic theory of scientific socialism<sup>[12]</sup>. This book not only provided a powerful ideological weapon for proletarian revolutions for the advancement of international labour movement, but also defended the Marxist world view.

In addition, Engels also enriched and developed the strategy and tactics of the proletarian revolution, illustrated in such works as "Introduction of *The Civil War in France*" and

“Introduction of *The Class Struggles in France 1848–1850*”. In the latter article, Engels analyzed the new phenomena in the political and economic life of capitalist countries in the last 20 years of the 19th century, reflected on views of Carl Marx and himself on the conditions and process of the revolutionary movement in 1848, and pointed out the new situation and the strategy of proletarian revolution in response to it. The strategy is—to take the universal suffrage as a new way of revolution. Those tweaks in strategy and a series of new thinking shows that the fundamental changes in the revolutionary conditions determine the change in the methods of revolutions, which manifests the noble characteristic of Marxism of keeping abreast with the times and enriches Marxist strategies on revolution<sup>[13]</sup>.

## 5. 2. New Reflections on Capitalism and Socialism

During 1880, capitalism came to transmit from its rising stage or the laissez-faire capitalism to imperialism. Engels published the book *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, clarifying the origin, theoretical basis and fundamental principles of scientific socialism. It provides a theoretical guidance for the proletariat. After Marx’s death, Engels spent a lot of time sorting out the works Marx left and eventually published part of Marx’s masterpieces on political economy—the second and third volume of *Das Kapital*. Apart from that, he also wrote many essays on political issues, such as “A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Program of 1891”, “The Peasant Question in France and Germany”, “Replies to Der Volkstaat” (official newspaper of the Old Social Democratic Party of Saxony) and so on. In those works, Engels systematically studied the tendency of capitalism in Europe and America at the end of the 19th century, and proposed for the first time that capitalism is heading for monopoly capitalism from free competition. In his later years, Engels also paid close attention to the backward countries in the East. For instance, he published “Social Problems in Russia”, focusing on the small-scale peasant economy in Russia and issues on capitalist development based on such a economy.

## 6. Epilogue

Friedrich Engels is an aspiring man, for he devoted all his life to the pursuit of truth and the achievements of human emancipation and communism. He researched assiduously so as to climb on the peak of science; he dived deeply into studies and acquired continuous advancement in his thoughts; he was alert to changes and bold in upgrading so he could always adjust strategies in time; he kept abreast with times and came up with new insights; he was also loyal and supportive to friends and comrades. Those merits of Friedrich Engels should be remembered by all. To commemorate such a man of noble merits in the 200th anniversary of his birth, this article is humbly dedicated.

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